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AUTHOR Kress, June
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ABSTRACT

The right-wing attack on women's rights in the United States manifests itself in the regulation of reproductive rights, the family, and the workplace and corresponds to the changing needs of capital in an era of social and economic crises. Against this background, anti-abortion legislation, the Family Protection Act, and discrimination in the workplace are supported by a national network of power and corporate wealth funded by industrialists and financiers. Currently, more women are entering the work force to supplement family income or as single heads of households. Women remain subjugated, however, by a bourgeois morality that suggests they are primarily wives and mothers and secondarily workers; as a result, low wages for women are legitimized. Until this bourgeois morality is challenged in the United States, women will continue to be exploited and capital will retain a free hand to move them in and out at will. The attack on women is only a small part of the national network of power and wealth, however, which also attacks busing, affirmative action, the graduated income tax, SALT II, and socialized medicine. (Author/KC)

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THE CURRENT ATTACK ON WOMEN'S RIGHTS: A POLITICAL-ECONOMIC PERSPECTIVE

by June Kress

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2701 Folsom Street San Francisco, CA 94110 (415) 550-1703

THE CURRENT ATTACK ON WOMEN'S RIGHTS: A POLITICAL-ECONOMIC PERSPECTIVE

by June Kress

The author wishes to express her appreciation to Marlene Dixon, Research Director of the Institute for the Study of Labor and Economic Crisis, whose writings on women served as the major theoretical orientation for this paper, and to Susanne Jonas and Tony Platt of ISLEC for their invaluable editorial assistance.

In the last two years, a great deal of information about the "New Right" has been published by feminists, socialists and representatives of the Right itself. Several major books have been written,[1] and many of the current issues of left-wing and feminist journals or newspapers focus on some aspect of the increasing right-wing attack.[2] Thus, there is not a dearth of information on the Right, but in fact an entire body of knowledge which has been developed.

Despite this proliferation, most analyses offer little help in clarifying the basis for the increasing rightward shift in the United States and around the world. Equally serious is the lack of quality analyses of the current and intensifying right-wing attack on women. Although much has been written about this attack, the studies either focus on singular issues around which the Right has mobilized—by and large the anti-abortion movement—or they focus only on the personalities of right-wing luminaries, and thus tell us nothing about why the attack on women is occurring at this particular historical conjuncture.

Going beyond simplistic exposés, I shall argue here that the right-wing attack on women in the U.S. today is by no means the product of a single interest group, as its popular image portrays; nor is it a mass movement, as its backers would have us believe. Instead, the attack is launched by a massive network of organized power and money and is an expression of the repressive necessities and interests of the bourgeoisie, united in their hatred of the working class in general and of working class women in particular. Moreover, I shall argue that the attack is not simply a voluntaristic expression of class attitudes of the bourgeoisie and sectors of the middle class; rather, it has its roots in the current crisis in the U.S. and the international capitalist economy, and represents one aspect of the ruling class' response to this crisis. The ideological legitimation for repressive attacks on women's rights and the superexploitation of women comes from bourgeois morality, which proclaims women to be inferior beings and lends itself to the particular needs of capital at this time.

Within this framework, I shall present an overview of the current attack on women in its various forms: the attack on women's reproductive rights, of which the anti-abortion movement is part and parcel; and the other political, legislative and economic manifestations of the attack, which most severely affect women at the workplace and in the family. I shall suggest that some of the control mechanisms and the ideological attacks in today's United States are strikingly similar to those of an earlier period, Nazi Germany, when the official ideology toward women was directly related to women's role in commodity production and the economic imperatives of the period.

I shall attempt to show that, now as then, the superexploitation of women in the work force and in the home, and the intensifying right-wing attack on women's rights, correspond to the changing needs of capital in an era of economic and social crisis, which is also an era of increasing concentration of power in the hands of a ruling minority. It is at such a historical

conjuncture that the superexploitation of women takes the form of a neofascist attack on women's rights. These factors make it possible to understand the apparent contradiction between the flood of women into the work force today and the right-wing ideology which promotes women's place as being in the home.

I. Capitalist Crisis and Reindustrialization

As background for understanding why the Reagan Administration and right-wing corporate interests in the U.S. today are launching a full-scale attack on women's rights, we must examine the changes that have occurred in the political economy of this country and around the world in the last 40 years.

The U.S. economy is now in the midst of a severe crisis which did not simply originate with the election of Reagan. Since the mid to late 1960's, the hegemonic power of the U.S. has been on the decline. The worldwide crisis of capital accumulation, a crisis of overproduction, as well as enormous changes in the capitalist world-system have brought about changes in both the international position of the U.S. and its domestic economic situation. No longer are we in the "imperial era" of postwar prosperity,[3] but rather in an era of unprecedented stagnation. Meanwhile, the transnational corporations, which operate outside the control of any government or international ruling body, have come to hold unlimited economic and political power.

The attempts by recent U.S. administrations to rebuild the international image of the U.S. and to control its domestic crisis led to the build-up of a massive military budget accompanied by a program of domestic austerity and cutbacks. Austerity capitalism, "the general attack on labor," has meant a dual attack on the working class:

> 1) first, it opposes protectionist measures for domestic industry, which produces massive unemployment; 2) secondly, it opposes social programs which divert state capital into social services, while demanding that wages be kept well below both the inflation rate and the established wage standard for organized labor.[4]

Austerity capitalism has meant a general lowering of the standard of living; the working class is bearing the brunt of this, but it is also hitting the middle class. The working class has suffered the most severe effects of austerity, as workers' real wages are eaten up by monopoly-controlled inflation, as social services are cut back on federal and local levels, as state capitalist policies like contracting out displace thousands of public sector workers, and as tax cuts benefit primarily the rich and the corporations.

New Deal liberalism in the postwar period offered organized labor a share of the pie of prosperity in an attempt to contain domestic unrest; today, by contrast, the labor force is getting supply-side economics, or Reaganomics, the president's proposal for stimulating economic growth. To cut labor costs in a period of stagnation, the ruling class is moving in the direction of abandonment of heavy industry, which cannot compete on the world market; and reindustrialization in high-technology manufacturing, such as electronics and computers, where the capital-labor ratio is increased. The "new industries" will employ mainly women and Third World workers, at the lowest wages possible within the U.S. Despite the low wages, women are forced to accept these jobs because even those who are married to men with jobs cannot support their families on one wage, as a result of the lowering of real wages and anti-labor policies generally.

To summarize the effects of the economic crisis for women: first, out of economic necessity, more women are entering the labor force, either as supplemental wage earners because of the reduction in real wages of their husbands, or as wage earners themselves due to the enormous increase in female-headed households. Unlike the period following World War II, when women were driven out of the labor force, today they are entering it at an unprecedented rate, and they are a permanent feature of that labor force. Second, the move toward reindustrialization has had the strongest impact upon women, for it is within the non-union sectors of high-technology manufacturing that women's labor is most desirable. Here, corporations can pay the lowest wages, while remaining free from the threat of unionization, and keeping men's wages down as a result of the lower wages paid to women.

II. Bourgeois Morality and the Subjugation of Women

We turn now to a second crucial aspect of the superexploitation of women both in the home and at the workplace: the bourgeois morality. Although women's labor in the home appears to be valueless, the exact opposite is true. Marx recognized the significance of the production and reproduction of labor power in his time; and today, when women still primarily provide for the reproduction of future generations of workers and care for the current working population (i.e., their husbands or perhaps fathers), women's work in the home continues to serve capital. The nature of the family as a separate unit apart from the sphere of production serves to mystify women's work within the family. Thus capital benefits in two ways: by the constant source of cheap labor provided by women who are not paid for the real value of their labor (much less for their labor at all), and by the focusing of the woman's anger and frustration on her husband, rather than the system of capitalism which is responsible. As Marlene Dixon explains the rewards accrued to capital:

> Both husband and wife in the proletariat are thus cheated and tricked by capital for the benefit and the purposes of capital. The system is all the more vicious because it serves to make the husband an unwitting accomplice of capital in the subjugation and exploitation of women.[5]

This exploitation, manifested in the undervaluation of women's work in the home, represents the epitome of cheap labor. So it is no surprise that the capitalist system strives to condition women (and men) through advertising, the media, the educational system, and capitalist culture in general to accept that a woman's rightful place is in the home providing the services to her husband and family. Given what it would cost to pay women what their labor is actually worth (a recent study by Michael Minton estimated that women's unwaged labor in the home in 1980 was worth $793.79 per week or $41,277.08 per annum[6]), it makes more sense from capital's point of view to inculcate upon women and men that a woman's place *is* in the home. The current ideology, I would argue, not only promotes the home as women's rightful place, but tries to convince them that they should like it as well.

The subservience of women in the home is reinforced when they enter the labor force, as they are doing at a high rate. The undervaluation of women's work in the home is mirrored within the labor force for men as well, so that the vast majority of the working class does not earn an adequate wage to maintain the family, particularly in times of inflation. As opposed to the old adage that women only work for pin money, more women today are entering the labor force out of sheer economic necessity, although the *notion* of pin money is still widely used to describe

and legitimize low wages. The benefits to capital are doubly accrued when women work outside of the home because the system can pay women at a lower rate (thus keeping male wages down as well), while women also continue to provide the unwaged labor in the home that guarantees the reproduction of labor power. Dixon makes this point exceedingly clear:

> . . . working women are superexploited when they enter the labor force: first, through the direct appropriation of surplus value in commodity production, and then a second time through the indirect (mediated through the family) appropriation of value from domestic labor.[7]

The extent to which women are used as part of the industrial reserve army and thereby superexploited in the labor force is regulated by changes in the nature of the work force itself. When there is a demand for greater numbers of women, such as occurred during World War II in the U.S. and Germany, or a demand for cheap labor power which women have historically provided, or a demand for part-time work only, women will be absorbed into the labor force. When the market can no longer absorb workers, women are forced out and must return to the home—as occurred after the war.

This precarious position is made all the more so by the dominant bourgeois morality, under which women are taught to identify themselves *primarily* as wives and mothers, and only temporarily or secondarily as workers. These factors, coupled with the institutionalized discrimination against women, giving them the lowest paid and most demeaning work, constitute the superexploitation of women. What sets the stage for the superexploitation of women both in the home and at work is the bourgeois morality. Through the superstructural institutions of capital—religion, social norms, legislation, the educational system, the media, etc.—women are identified primarily as wives and mothers (or future mothers) even when they are employed outside of the home. Many men do not consider women to be real workers, but rather some sort of an "invisible" or mystified work force; and many women accept this identification. This view, along with the traditional segregation of male and female work (for example, manufacturing vs. clerical sectors) and in conjunction with the growing competition for jobs, divides working men and women.

Thus, the bourgeois morality serves capital in several ways: materially, it legitimizes low wages for women who are, after all, not "real workers"; it maintains a segregated work force where doing "women's work" automatically means lower wages; and it depresses the wages of the entire working class by the low wages paid to women. Ideologically, the bourgeois morality keeps men and women apart, whether in the home, where the wife is pitted against the husband, or in the work force, where men workers view women as "a species apart, not as part of themselves as workers."[8] Consequently, the prospects for the unionization of women remain slim relative to those of men. In the words of Marlene Dixon,

> The bourgeois morality promotes in women a self-identification primarily as *wives and mothers* (or wives and mothers-to-be) and not as *workers*, even when they are in the active labor force. . . . large numbers of women in the labor force, objectively wage workers, are subject to discrimination which is justified in terms of the wife-mother role.
>
> The principal definition of "respectable" women as wife-mothers has been the source of low class consciousness and the limited political development of working women. . . . The alienated and isolated housewife, the strikebreaking wife-mother, the apolitical, passive and submissive female workers in manufacturing are, in part, results of women's ideological submission to bourgeois morality, reinforced by complementary male prejudices and by

the realities of female superexploitation.... Subjugation historically has produced low class consciousness and a resistance to political development. Refusal to deal with the realities of female oppression serves only to perpetuate what capital wishes: *not to have to fear the militance of the female half of the proletariat.*[9]

III. The Parameters of the New Right's Attack on Women

A. Reproductive Rights

It is against this background that we now consider the current right-wing attack on women's rights. Immediately following the Supreme Court's historic 1973 decision that legalized abortion, opponents of women's right to abortion initiated a campaign to dismantle hard-won gains in the area of reproductive rights. With the ultimate goal being to amend the U.S. Constitution through a "human life" amendment, and thus ban all abortions, conservative politicians have spent many years in the legislative arena fighting abortion. In the spring of 1979 alone, 20 "human life" amendments with 44 co-sponsors were introduced in the House of Representatives, and 2 were introduced in the Senate with 17 co-sponsors.[10] Several versions of the Human Life Amendment continue to be the subject of congressional debate: in the summer of 1981, Senate subcommittees held hearings on the Helms-Hyde Bill (S.158/H.R.900), which holds that life begins at fertilization. Enactment of this bill would allow the states to prosecute abortion as murder.[11] Another version of the Human Life Amendment, introduced by Senator Jake Garn (R-Utah) and Representative James Oberstar (R-Minn.) and co-sponsored by 30 congressmen, grants equal protection by law to all living humans at the time of conception.[12] Although anti-abortion forces have not yet agreed upon the exact wording of a Human Life Amendment, the likelihood exists for a nationwide prohibition on abortion and with it the possibility of a ban on some forms of contraception.[13]

One of the most virulent legislative attacks on the reproductive rights of women was the passage of the Hyde Amendment in 1977 which prohibited the use of federal funds for abortion. The Supreme Court's upholding of the Hyde Amendment in 1980 in effect put the lid on alternate sources of abortion funding for poor women. Since then, 37 states have passed their own versions of the Hyde Amendment.[14] Although some argue that nationwide 95% of those women who would have been covered by Medicaid managed to obtain legal abortions anyway, in states where Medicaid funding is no longer available, many more women have instead had babies. According to one source from the Center for Disease Control, whose findings were suppressed from a Senate Judiciary Subcommittee hearing last year,[15] about 20-30% of poor women who wanted abortions were forced to bear children; and in some states, up to 5% of low-income women resorted to illegal or self-induced abortions.[16]

One of the most recent setbacks in the fight for abortion funding occurred last summer when the House of Representatives voted to stop government workers from using their federal health insurance coverage to pay for abortions except when the mother's life is in danger. The ban—tacked on to a Treasury Department-Postal Service appropriations bill—would affect 10 million federal workers and their dependents.[17] (A similar measure prohibiting state workers from using their health insurance for abortions has already been passed in Massachusetts.[18]) In the event the federal appropriations bill fails to pass the Senate, anti-abortion forces may turn to the Reagan Administration's Office of Personnel Management, which negotiates insurance programs for federal workers.[19] This could signal a final blow to the rights of women who are federal workers to obtain affordable abortions, given the aggressively anti-abortion stance already shown by Reagan policymakers.

At the same time that the federal government is providing diminished funding of abortions, particularly for women on welfare, it is paying for 95% of the costs for their sterilization. Singled out are poor and minority women. According to Lynn Cooper,[20] approximately 35% of the women of childbearing age in Puerto Rico have been sterilized. Among Native Americans, 42% of the women and 10% of the men have been sterilized, many without consent or knowledge. Moreover, the sterilization rate of never-married black women is 9 times higher than that of never-married white women.[21] Of course, forced sterilization of poor and minority women is not a new phenomenon. Data from 1975, for example, show that an estimated 100,000 to 150,000 low-income persons were sterilized annually over a period of several years in the early- to mid-1970's under federally funded programs[22]—calling to mind the eugenics movements of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, aimed at minority and working class women.

Today, however, the risk of forced sterilization is no longer confined to the welfare rolls, but has broadened to include working women. Persistently using hundreds of dangerous chemicals, corporations are now giving women workers the "choice" of sterilization or job reclassification. General Motors near Toronto, for example, decided to transfer women workers out of its battery manufacturing area unless they would prove they were no longer able to have children, since lead swallowed or inhaled was shown to cause miscarriages or birth defects. One woman underwent sterilization rather than take a pay cut or a shift change. Of the 20,000 chemicals commonly found in workplaces, only about 20 of them have been tested for their effects on the unborn; they are now linked to birth defects and miscarriages, so there are doubtless many more.[23]

Women are also victimized by the profit motive of the pharmaceutical industry, the most recent example of which is Toxic Shock Syndrome (TSS). Rather than manufacture safer tampons for women, at least one corporation has spent millions of dollars in research to "vindicate its product" and to discredit Federal Center for Disease Control findings about the dangers of the company's tampon.[24] The federal health administration has bowed to industry pressure, so that very little action has been taken, and certainly no regulations have been prescribed, to formally warn women about the causes and effects of TSS. At the same time, the federal government is now playing a decisive role in the case of Depo-Provera, a contraceptive that has been tested and found to be carcinogenic. The Reagan Administration has proposed the distribution of Depo-Provera to Third World women through the Agency for International Development (AID). Furthermore, the drug will soon be the subject of Food and Drug Administration hearings over its legalization as a contraceptive in the United States.[25]

Thus, the attack on the reproductive rights of women to choose abortion as an alternative, to have safe, affordable abortions, and to be free from forced sterilization is an attack that is being condoned, and in many instances supported, by the current administration. It is a legislative and legal attack and, as we have shown, a physical assault on women's right to choose, particularly affecting working class and minority women.

B. The Family

The economic position of women, especially within the family, has changed greatly in the last period of time. Today, 85% of single-parent families are headed by women.[26] For these women, poverty is a reality. In a recent report from the National Advisory Council on Economic Opportunity, 1 in 3 households headed by women was found to be below the poverty level, compared to 1 in 18 households headed by men.[27]

Women, then, will be most seriously affected by the kinds of cutbacks in essential human services that are a hallmark of the Reagan Administration. Recently, Reagan announced an 11% cut in the welfare rolls for October 1981—this cut comes at a time when 25 to 30 million families (of whom 59% are female) must survive on food stamps, federally funded nutrition programs, AFDC and Medicare.[28] In particular, Reagan has his eye on drastically cutting food stamps. Last year, his plan would have slashed by 25% federal food stamp assistance for about 22 million low-income Americans.[29] These cuts have long been pushed by Jesse Helms, who in his role as chair of the Senate Agriculture Committee has discussed up to 40% reductions in food stamp spending. But according to USDA statistics, more than 80% of food stamp recipients are children and single parents, and most of these households are poor—well below the federal poverty line income of $7,450 a year for a family of four.[30]

Women in families are also victimized by domestic violence, which is now being compounded by cuts in funding to aid such victims. Recently, right-wing forces in Congress opposed a bill which would have approved funding for programs to aid battered women in families. The bill, S.1843, was sponsored by women's organizations and social service and civil rights groups. Vehemently opposed by organizations like the Moral Majority, the bill was declared to be "an intrusion into the family," and an opportunity for "radical feminists" to come to the "federal trough for a $65 million feed."[31]

However, the most vicious attack on the family is the Reagan Administration's Family Protection Act (FPA). Introduced into the last Congress by Paul Laxalt, Reagan's campaign manager and Moral Majority spokesman in Congress, the act provides an ideological and economic justification for lowering women's wages, undervaluing the unwaged labor women do in the home, and depressing the wages of all workers.[32] Briefly, the FPA contains provisions that allow tax deductions when a family has or adopts children. This encourages large families, but with increasing cuts in childcare programs, women in effect are pushed out of the job market. In addition, there are no benefits for the increasing numbers of women who head households. The bill also contains several provisions that could have drastic effects on education—for example, by denying funds to programs that teach nonsexist values. In short, the FPA is an attack on working class women, which is part and parcel of the overall attack by the Right on working class families. Although the bill has only a slim chance of passing both houses of Congress, there is the ever-present danger of its provisions being attached to other bills and quietly slipping through.

C. Women Workers

The escalating economic and legal attack on women can also be seen at the workplace, as women over the age of 18 now comprise at least 56% of the working population.[33] Although the labor force is expected to grow by 25 million by 1995, with women accounting for some two-thirds of that growth, there is no guarantee that women's earnings will begin to equal those of men for comparable work.[34] According to the Equal Employment Opportunities Commission, 54% of all women workers are still trapped in sex-segregated work, mostly associated with the clerical and service sectors,[35] and in the coming period, we may expect this figure to rise. In the last 20 years alone, the clerical sector has grown to 20 million, a fifth of the total workforce.[36] Clerical and service sector work means dead-end jobs, and on an average pays less than $10,000 a year. As a result, some 1.4 million women in this country must take on second jobs in order to make ends meet for themselves and their families.[37]

Compounding sex-segregated work and low wages are the current cutbacks aimed at all workers; these portend a lower standard of living, especially for women. One example is Reagan's

cutback in training programs like CETA by over 300,000 jobs. Similarly, many CETA-staffed daycare programs are likely to be axed.[38] Reagan has also proposed enacting a two-tier minimum wage system that could result in youths replacing women workers at even lower wages, and in increased unemployment and lower wage levels for women.[39] With only 17% of all women workers in unions, this trend is on the rise.[40]

For retired women workers, the prospects for security and dignity in old age remain bleak. Reagan's drastic plans to cut social security benefits by 23% over the next 75 years were recently scuttled in favor of seemingly less severe congressional proposals; but these in fact are no less detrimental to elderly women, who constitute the majority of senior citizens.[41] Current proposals include eliminating the minimum social security payment of $122 a month, which would affect some 3 million people, mostly women in their seventies.[42] We may expect those hardest hit to be black women over 65 who live in poverty; they will be affected more than twice as much as white women.[43]

There are also rumblings within the Reagan Administration of a reorganization within the Department of Justice, accompanied by a weakening of its Civil Rights Division and affirmative action policy. This suggestion has come from the right-wing think tank, the Heritage Foundation, which includes some of Reagan's advisers. Along with potential changes in the Department of Labor, existing affirmative action guidelines could be further weakened. Senator Orrin Hatch (R-Utah) has even proposed a constitutional amendment which would prohibit affirmative action![44]

Finally, the intensifying efforts to dismantle the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) must be seen as an assault on all workers. According to one source, the Reagan Administration has "gutted and delayed" critical OSHA standards, "whittled away at guidelines for inspection and enforcement," and "censored educational materials produced under OSHA grants."[45] Such actions are justified by claims to be stimulating "economic recovery," but for women at the workplace, the deregulation of OSHA can only mean a serious threat. Only now are health hazards to women who hold clerical and service sector jobs and non-traditional industry jobs being examined. But, like funding for all programs that aid women, funding for this type of research is likely to dry up, along with any serious enactment and enforcement of the safety and health regulations for which OSHA ostensibly exists.[46]

The attack on women, then, is in no way limited to their right to choose for abortion. While the assault on reproductive rights is most closely associated with the right wing, it is only the tip of the iceberg. Indeed, the attack on women in the 1980's, of which working class and minority women bear the brunt, runs the gamut from deep social service cuts to intimidating legislation.

Although it would be overly simplistic to blame Reagan per se for the attack on women, it is no accident that Reagan himself holds views which are representative of the Right's ideology, particularly his anti-abortion beliefs which he has made public. In addition, Reagan's numerous appointments of anti-abortion and anti-right-to-choose administrators to high government positions facilitate the kinds of cuts described above. One of Reagan's most recent nominations was that of C. Everett Koop for Surgeon General, now famous for his statement that "the continued right of abortion would lead to legalized murder of medically imperfect babies as well as to the compulsory killing of elderly sick people."[47] Other anti-abortion bureaucrats in the Reagan Administration include Health and Human Services head Richard Schweiker, who has announced his support for the Helms-Hyde Bill, and has proposed that his department no longer provide any birth control information, devices or medicine.[48] Schweiker has appointed Marjory Mecklenberg, former head of American Citizens Concerned for Life, an anti-abortion group, to direct the department's Office of Adolescent Pregnancy. Donald Devine, director of the Office of Personnel

Management, is now becoming well-known for his targeting of Planned Parenthood.[49] All are arch opponents of women's right to choose and all hold powerful positions in the federal apparat, particularly in places that hold the pursestrings and power to dismantle programs that affect women.

Despite its visibility and prominence, the right-wing attack on women's rights is by no means an isolated phenomenon. Although it would appear that the strongest organizational forces behind the current rightward mobilization against women are the anti-abortion "single interest" groups that seek to destroy women's reproductive rights and to preserve the nuclear family, in reality these organizations are but a small part of a massive network linked by a common leadership, financial backing and ideological focus. The larger network of right-wing power sees women's issues as just one target in its broadside attacks against busing, affirmative action, the graduated income tax, SALT II and socialized medicine. The names connected to this national network are by now becoming all too familiar: National Conservative Political Action Committee, the Committee for the Survival of a Free Congress, the Conservative Caucus and the American Conservative Union, to name only a few of the largest right-wing centers of power.

Financially, the Right is supplied with vast sums of money from leading sectors of the bourgeoisie. The Right's claim to be bankrolled by millions of ordinary taxpayers flies in the face of the staggering sums of money known to be contributed to the Right by industrialists and financiers. For example, Richard Mellon Scaife, heir to the Mellon fortune, whose assets have been valued at $250 million, is reported to donate $10 million every year to right-wing causes.[50] Other patrons of the Right include brewery magnate Joseph Coors and Justin Dart of Dart Industries. Coors, in particular, has provided untold amounts of seed money for the establishment of right-wing organizations, such as the Heritage Foundation, one of the Right's most powerful think tanks, formed in 1973, and the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), founded in 1974. Today, ALEC is an independent corporation of state legislators and members of Congress who have, among other things, challenged Congress' extension of the ERA ratification deadline.[51] Much of its $400,000 budget comes from corporate donors, such as the Scaife Foundation of Pittsburgh, the Eli Lilly Foundation and the Keegan Foundation Charitable Family Trust. Donations to ALEC to underwrite conferences around the country have been received from Ashland Oil, Chevron, Mountain Bell, Commonwealth Edison and military hardware corporations.[52] Right-wing coffers are also filled by the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, Exxon, Bethlehem Steel, J.C. Penney, Chase Manhattan Bank, Weyerhauser, Reader's Digest, Pizza Hut, Amway, Mobil Oil, Coca Cola and members of the Pew family (Sun Oil) and the Ohlin family (chemical company), to name only a few of the right-wing philanthropists.[53]

Clearly then, the right-wing attack on women is neither the product of a single interest group nor a mass movement. Instead, it is the product of a national network of power and corporate wealth, and as we have said, "an expression of the repressive necessities and interests of the bourgeoisie,"[54] aimed at the working class in general and at working class women in particular.

IV. The Control of Women in Nazi Germany

In order to fully comprehend the political implications of the current right-wing attack on women's rights in the U.S. today, we turn now to an earlier moment of history: Nazi Germany. We do so not in order to argue that classical fascism is around the corner in the U.S., but to show that one of the hallmarks of what Marlene Dixon has called "emergent neofascism"—the attack on women's rights—does in fact have its parallels in the classical fascism of the Third Reich. By making this comparison, we hope to advance our understanding of what is happening to women workers and to the entire working class in the U.S. today.

In his recent book, *Friendly Fascism*, Bertram Gross suggests that fascism as a form of political rule does not follow a predetermined blueprint. It does not necessarily happen through a violent military coup or state of siege, but could occur in the U.S. in gradual stages. Gross provides some timely warnings about the "omens of neofascism," among them the austerity phase of capitalism and its benefits for big business; the restructuring of world power, in part by means of the supranational Trilateral Commission; and the rise of the radical Right,[55] all of which are in existence today.

To Gross's list we might add several features described in the last section on the general attack on women, such as the escalation of the anti-abortion movement, economic incentives to stimulate birth rates, and the control of women within the labor force. This is not to say that the attack on women represents fascism, but we would argue that if history teaches us anything about the future as well as the past, many aspects of the attack on women today have their precursors in a period not so long ago: Nazi Germany. Therefore, in the following section, we will present the salient features of the ideological and economic attack on women's rights waged by the Third Reich from the early 1930's through the mid-1940's.

Following the rise of the German feminist movement of the 1860's, women obtained some economic, political and social gains. But most German women did not benefit by the relatively few changes brought about by the middle class and socialist feminist movements. Only middle and upper class women were affected by the reforms, such as access to higher education and professional occupations, and even then they faced extreme sex discrimination. For the majority of lower-middle class and working class women, work still meant low-paying, sex-segregated, dead-end jobs in the clerical, service and manufacturing sectors. Women also provided the unwaged labor in the home.

Thus when the National Socialist movement gained power in the 1920's and put forward the ideology that women under the Third Reich were to have only one role, that of mothers in the service of the Nazi state, many women supported this. According to one source, they supported Hitler and the Nazi Party because "the Nazis successfully played on their fears, frustrations and insecurities, just as they did on those of men. Moreover, in the role of mothers of the race, Nazism offered women high status and a sense of purpose."[56] Under the slogan of *"Kinder, Kirche, Küche"* (Children, Church, Kitchen), the Third Reich attempted to control the female population during a time of inflation, economic instability and impending war.

Indeed, the Third Reich developed a whole ideology with regard to women's position in society and enacted numerous legal and economic measures in accordance with their beliefs about women. Briefly, the ideological argument was that in modern Germany women did not have respect or equality; in some mythical Nordic past, women had been equal fighters in the building of the German race. As Riemer and Fout explain:

> [The Nazis] insisted that women's and men's spheres were different but equally important and that the so-called emancipation of women was a hoax. Women should return to their traditional roles and not seek to compete with men. Men in turn must give honor and recognition to women.[57]

Thus the Nazis promulgated the ideology of "the 3 Ks" in an attempt to control a large segment of the population and manage the economic crisis of the 1920's and 1930's. But although the Nazis accepted the view of motherhood as women's proper function, they had only contempt for women. "They used women, as they used men and children, according to the needs of the [Nazi] party. . . . In return for the glorification of motherhood, the Nazis demanded total subordination."[58]

After the Nazis took power in 1933, Hitler ordered all women who had husbands or fathers to be removed from the labor force. Single women were also forced out of work. The goal of Nazi policy vis-à-vis women was to increase the birth rate, which had sharply dropped between 1900 and 1930 as a result of both contraception and the loss of potential husbands during World War I. But in reality, Hitler's policies were aimed at the problem of unemployment, a battle that was "from the beginning a symbolic test of the Nazi regime."[59] At the end of 1933 when Hitler claimed to have found work for almost 2 million unemployed Germans, the employment rate had risen by only 1,300,000. Women workers, by and large, were displaced by married male workers, and of people reemployed between January 1933 and March 1934, only 12.8% were women.[60]

Hitler offered a simple solution to the problem of unemployment. He proposed to find husbands for all German women, to remove married women from the labor force, and to redistribute their jobs to those men who were out of work. "Husbands would then support their wives while women happily raised large numbers of young Aryans" went the official argument.[61] Thus, the Nazis introduced various economic incentives in the early 1930's for the purpose of controlling the labor force and increasing the marriage and birth rates. Beginning in 1933, marriage loans were granted to young couples. Under this program, newly-weds initially received loans of up to 1,000 marks. The birth of each of the first four children converted one quarter of the loan into a gift. The loan—minus deductions as a result of births—was repayable at 3% per month if both parents went to work, and at 1% if only the father worked.[62] These loans were probably one of the first steps toward removal of women from the labor force. To provide the money for the loans, a tax on the wages of unmarried women workers was levied.[63] Between 1933 and the end of 1938, 1,121,000 such loans were granted; 980,000 loans were cancelled due to births, representing a nearly 90% human yield on the Nazi's investment.[64]

Other economic incentives included child subsidies which were grants to parents of large families with limited incomes. These subsidies, to be spent on furniture, clothes and other necessities, were limited to a maximum of 100 marks per child and 1,000 marks per family. In order to receive a child subsidy, the family had to have at least four children under 16, a stipulation which did not apply to widows, divorcees and unmarried mothers.[65]

There were also child allowances of 10 marks per month for the third and fourth child, and 20 marks per month for the fifth child.[66] Similarly, in October 1933, a 15% income tax reduction was granted for each of the first four children, with a 30% reduction for each succeeding child. In addition, school fees and costs for medical services were reduced for large families.[67]

But women's reproduction and thus their position in the labor force were also controlled through harsh legislative measures: After 1933, abortion was allowed only in exceptional cases; from 1941 on, the production of contraceptive devices was largely prohibited. All birth control clinics were closed. Abortions were termed "acts of sabotage against Germany's racial future." Nazi courts sentenced doctors found guilty of performing abortions to jail terms of 6 to 15 years.[68] After 1943, the repeated practice of abortion became punishable by death.[69]

Nonetheless, abortion was allowed both in cases where "hereditarily diseased persons" had somehow circumvented the laws governing sterilization of the physically deformed, mentally retarded, epileptic, deaf or blind parent and in cases where embryos were reputed to be half Jewish—all for the preservation of a pure Aryan race.[70] The Sterilization Law went into effect in 1934, under which a series of hereditary health courts were established to deliver final judgments. Persons suspected of "hereditary disease" were forced to appear and show cause why they should not be sterilized. At that time, it was estimated that 400,000 persons would be affected. The Berlin Court, during the first 10 weeks of operation, ordered 325 sterilizations. In July of 1934, the Third Reich held that resident as well as nonresident aliens were also subject to the sterilization law.[71] The magazine *German Justice* reported that 27,958 women were sterilized by the end of 1934, with 5% of the cases resulting in death.[72]

Meanwhile, the Third Reich ran "breeding camps" to which selected unmarried German males were sent for the purposes of impregnating selected German women. Once pregnant, the women could go to homes that were provided by the Nazis to await childbirth.[73]

By the late 1930's, however, as the Third Reich prepared to enter the war, the need arose for a cheap supply of labor. Consequently, Nazi Germany embarked on a new period of bringing women back from the home into the factories. As Riemer and Fout describe it:

> . . . they rewrote their history and claimed that until the modern industrial period women had worked and made an important economic contribution. The Nazis would correct this injustice and restore women to their traditional roles and status. From now on German women were to be mothers *and* workers in the service of the Nazi state.[74]

Between 1937 and 1939, the female labor force increased by nearly 50%.[75] By 1939, the number of women workers rose to 6.7 million; by the end of 1940, after a year of war, to 8.3 million; and by September 1941, to 9.4 million.[76] By the fall of 1942, an estimated 12 million women were working, and by the end of 1943 as many as 14 million, with 40% estimated to be married and 40% with children.[77] Indeed, by 1942, the female labor force was almost twice as large as it had been before the Nazis took power.[78]

This massive increase was largely due to the Third Reich's mobilization for the armaments industry. In 1942, measures were taken to divert labor from commodities production to war-related industries, and women who either had been previously unemployed or engaged in work not considered essential—including waitressing, sales, dressmaking and domestic work—were called into service to the war effort. Then in 1943, labor service without exception was introduced. Wives of working class soldiers supporting families on War Relief were threatened with the loss of their payments if they refused to engage in essential war industry. Women of all ages were shipped to war plants across Germany and it is estimated that about 2.5 million new workers were reintegrated in this manner in 1942 alone.

As the war progressed, the Third Reich undertook additional mobilizations to deal with the labor shortage. The age limit for compulsory labor of women was raised from 45 to 50 years. As a result of these compulsory laws, in 1943 the majority of German labor was women and girls.[79] But even compulsory service did not bring in enough workers, so the Third Reich enacted a compulsory mobilization of labor in foreign countries.[80]

Despite this growth, the ideological underpinnings of Nazism were consistent: the opportunities for advancement of women remained small and they were paid less than men for comparable work.[81] The fact is that female labor was cheaper, both before and during the war. Skilled women earned 66% of men's wages, and unskilled women 70%, an economic reality that benefited German capital.[82]

V. Conclusion

The program, policies and ideologies of the Third Reich are relevant in several respects for understanding the situation of women in the U.S. today. For one thing, there are parallels—for example, in regard to the racial/racist bent of anti-abortion and pro-sterilization policies. More significant, however, is the overall treatment of women in the labor force. What becomes clear from the example of Nazi Germany is that the Third Reich was able to manipulate women out of or into the labor force, as needed by capital—in each case providing an ideological justification—because the bourgeois morality denied women economic and social equality with men.

And this is indeed the situation of women workers (and of immigrant workers) in the U.S. today. The U.S. ruling class is able to maintain women either in the home, where they are not paid at all for their labor, or in the labor force at low wages—in short, is able to deal with women as an important segment of the reserve army of labor—to the extent that working class women and men accept the dominant bourgeois morality. It is this morality which defines women primarily as wives and mothers, whether or not they are objectively a growing part of the labor force, and therefore deprives them of equal rights as workers. Until this morality is decisively challenged, women will continue to be superexploited, whether as servants in the home or as cheap labor at the workplace; and capital will retain a free hand to move them in and out of the work force at will.

The parallel with the Third Reich also provides us with a way of understanding the apparent contradiction in the situation of women in the U.S. today—the contradiction between the rising participation of women in the labor force and the ideological thrust of the New Right that women's place is in the home (including material incentives like the Family Protection Act and restrictions on abortion rights). If indeed there is any contradiction, it is not an antagonistic contradiction; and the appearance of contradiction only serves the interests of capital. For as the right wing pushes for the subservience of women in the home, it is also pushing for the subservience of women in the labor force. And this is exactly what capital requires: a constant, cheap source of labor for the high-technology industries and service and clerical sectors in which women most often work and which are continuing to expand.

Thus, there is not a contradiction between the changing position of women in today's labor force and the current campaign by the right wing that women should go back into the home, have endless children, and reproduce future generations of workers. Women will continue to enter the labor force as their economic needs and the economic needs of capital dictate. But as long as the subservience of women in the home can be reproduced and maintained in the labor force, the superexploitation of women will continue, to the benefit of capital, and to the detriment of the entire working class, male and female.

Like the ideology of sexism, racism benefits capital, but the combination of the two provides an even more vicious weapon to be used against the working class. Racism, like sexism, is a form of class relations in terms of perpetuating inequality, subordination and the assumed superiority of one human over another. Racism, like sexism, is also profitable to the capitalist system because the low wages of minority workers depress the wages of all workers. Moreover, racism, like sexism, ensures that there will be a constant reproduction of a reserve army of labor which can be used to keep the lid on the wages of the working class overall.

But when racism is added to sexism, particularly in the labor force, as it is for millions of national and racial minority women who do work, there is a nasty twist. Together these guarantee the *permanent* superexploitation and demoralization of minority women. As the social welfare cuts hit minority women especially hard, they are driven into the labor force and must compete

with white women for the same jobs. But they are also competing with men whose labor force participation is on the decline. Thus, a vicious dynamic of competition is set up in terms of trying to get a job and earn enough money to support a family. This dynamic serves to keep a key sector of the labor force—some 56% of all workers being women—underpaid and unorganized, divided from the male half of the proletariat. The capitalists know this and the right-wing politicians know this. That is why as the hegemonic power of the United States further declines and the domestic economy takes a turn for the worse, even more insidious manifestations of right-wing sexist and racist ideology and practical "solutions" vented on the working class will come into play. Undoubtedly, we will see an array of economic incentives to lure women back into the home, accompanied by a further tightening on the reproductive rights of women. Perhaps we may witness a compulsory labor service for women workers if and when the capital accumulation process dictates the need. What is at least certain is that as the accumulation of capital increases, the accumulation of misery for the working class in general and for proletarian women in particular will correspondingly rise. That is why the millions of working women, the "invisible" work force, critical to the perpetuation of a cruel system of exploitation and yet at the same time capable of undermining that very system, must become visible.

NOTES

1. See, for example, Alan Crawford, *Thunder on the Right: The "New Right" and the Politics of Resentment* (New York, Pantheon, 1980); Michael Miles, *The Odyssey of the American Right* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1980); and Bertram Gross, *Friendly Fascism* (New York, M. Evans Co., 1980).

2. See, for example, *Radical America, New Left Review, Socialist Review, Guardian, In These Times* and *Feminist Studies*.

3. "On the Situation in the USA Today," an interview with Marlene Dixon. *Our Socialism* 2, 8 (October 16-31, 1981), p. 3.

4. Marlene Dixon, "Responsibilities of the U.S. Working Class to Latin American Revolutionary Movements in a New Cold War Period." *Contemporary Marxism* 1 (1980), p. vii.

5. Marlene Dixon, "On the Superexploitation of Women," in *Women in Class Struggle* (San Francisco, Synthesis Publications, 1978), pp. 6-7.

6. *San Francisco Chronicle* (June 29, 1981).

7. *Women in Class Struggle*, op. cit., p. 9.

8. Ibid., p. 23.

9. Ibid., pp. 23-24.

10. Christine R. Riddiough, "Women, Feminism, and the 1980 Elections." *Socialist Review* 56 (March-April 1981), p. 42.

11. Bernard Weintraub, "This Time, It's a Close Call on Anti-Abortion Bill." *New York Times* (June 14, 1981), p. 8E.

12. *Off Our Backs* (October 1981), p. 8.

13. Reproductive Freedom Project, ACLU Foundation, *The So-Called "Human Life" Amendment* (New York, n.d.). Repressive forces at the state level have been just as harsh in the attack on women's rights, particularly in California where several restrictions on women's reproductive rights are now being debated in the state legislature. For example, one state constitutional amendment would sharply curtail the use of budget appropriations and thus limit almost all state abortion funding for poor women. Action on this amendment will be taken in early 1982. One Senate bill requiring abortion patients to wait 24 hours after giving written informed consent, except in medical emergencies, passed the State Senate and will go before the California Assembly in January 1982. Other repressive bills that have narrowly failed in the California legislature have ranged from parental consent for abortion for unmarried minors, to mandatory detailed reporting on all abortions to state health officials. *ACLU News* (JuneJuly 1981).

14. Hanna Lessinger, "Reagan Wants Women Back in the Home." *Guardian* (Fall 1981), p. 12.

15. *Los Angeles Times* (July 12, 1981), p. 1.

16. *Guardian* (September 16, 1981), p. 6.

17. *San Francisco Chronicle* (July 31, 1981).

18. Hanna Lessinger, "House Passes Anti-Abortion Law." *Guardian* (August 26, 1981), p. 6.

19. *Off Our Backs*, op. cit.

20. Lynn Cooper, "The Attack on Women's Rights." *Crime and Social Justice* 15 (Summer 1981), p. 40.

21. Ibid.

22. Quoted in Dorie Klein and June Kress, "Any Woman's Blues: A Critical Overview of Women, Crime and the Criminal Justice System." *Crime and Social Justice* 5 (Spring-Summer 1976), p. 46.

23. Phyllis Lehmann, "Protecting Women Out of Their Jobs" (Somerville, Massachusetts, New England Free Press, n.d.), pp. 1, 8.

24. Judith Beck and Charlotte Oram, "Tampons: Looking Beyond Toxic Shock." *Science for the People* 13, 5 (September-October 1981), p. 17.

25. Cooper, op. cit., p. 40.

26. Muriel Nazzari, "The Significance of Present-Day Changes in the Institution of Marriage." *The Review of Political Economics* 12, 2 (Summer 1980), p. 70.

27. Riddiough, op. cit., p. 53.

28. Lessinger (Fall 1981), op. cit.

29. *Washington Post* (January 28, 1981), p. A2.

30. Ibid.

31. Riddiough, op. cit., pp. 53-54.

32. Ibid., p. 43; Rosalind Pollack Petchesky, "Antiabortion, Antifeminism, and the Rise of the New Right." *Feminist Studies* 7, 2 (Summer 1981), p. 224; *Plain Speaking* 5, 13 (September 16-30, 1981), p. 6.

33. Ben Bedell, "New Union Drive for Women Workers." *Guardian* (October 28, 1981), p. 6.

34. Linda Charlton, "A Larger Role for Women and Minorities." *New York Times* (October 11, 1981), p. 43.

35. Lessinger (Fall 1981), op. cit.

36. Bedell, op. cit.

37. Lessinger (Fall 1981), op. cit.

38. Ibid.

39. Riddiough, op. cit., p. 44.

40. Bedell, op. cit.

41. Mark Ramsey, "Social Security Under the Knife." *Plain Speaking* 5, 11 (July 16-31, 1981), p. 4; Riddiough, op. cit., p. 43.

42. Ramsey, op. cit.

43. Riddiough, op. cit., p. 44.

44. Ibid.

45. "Regulating Workers' Health." *Dollars and Sense* 70 (October 1981), p. 3.

46. Riddiough, op. cit., p. 44.

47. Cooper, op. cit., p. 40.

48. Ibid.

49. *San Francisco Chronicle* (May 2, 1981); *Washington Post* (September 30, 1981).

50. Benjamin Stevens, "Where Does the New Right Get Its Money?" *Guardian* (Fall 1981), p. 21. Several prominent Reagan Administration officials hold positions in right-wing organizations that are beholden to Mellon Scaife's financial patronage: the Center for Strategic and International Studies, home base of former National Security Adviser Richard Allen and U.N. Ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick; the Institute for Contemporary Studies, founded by presidential adviser Edwin Meese; the Mountain States Legal Defense Fund, formerly directed by Interior Secretary James Watt; and the National Strategy Information Center, a former director of which was William Casey, now head of the CIA.

51. William A. Hunter (edited by Thomas W. Bonnett), *The "New Right": A Growing Force in State Politics* (Washington, D.C., a joint publication of the Conference on Alternative State and Local Policies and the Center to Protect Workers' Rights, 1980), pp. 33-34, 63.

52. Ibid., p. 66.

53. Stevens, op. cit.

54. Dixon (1981), op. cit., p. 3.

55. Gregory Shank, "A Review of Bertram Gross's *Friendly Fascism*." *Crime and Social Justice* 15 (Summer 1981), p. 73.

56. *European Women: A Documentary History, 1789-1945.* Edited by Eleanor S. Riemer and John C. Fout (New York, Schocken Books, 1980), p. 104.

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60. Ibid.

61. Riemer and Fout, op. cit., p. 105.

62. Richard Grunberger, *The 12-Year Reich* (New York, Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1971), p. 235; Karl Hardach, *The Political Economy of Germany in the Twentieth Century* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1980), p. 58; Joachim C. Fest, *The Face of the Third Reich* (New York, Pantheon Books, 1970), p. 269.

63. Roy Pascal, *The Nazi Dictatorship* (London, George Routledge & Sons, Ltd., 1934), p. 205.

64. Grunberger, op. cit., p. 235.

65. Ibid.

66. Ibid.

67. Schuman, op. cit., pp. 384-85.

68. Grunberger, op. cit., p. 239; Hardach, op. cit., p. 68.

69. Hardach, op. cit., pp. 67-68.

70. Grunberger, op. cit., p. 238.

71. Schuman, op. cit., p. 382.

72. Riemer and Fout, op. cit., p. 113.

73. Ibid., p. 106.

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75. Grunberger, op. cit., p. 241.

76. Max Seydewitz, *Civil Life in Wartime Germany* (New York, The Viking Press, 1945), p. 248.

77. Ibid.

78. Grunberger, op. cit., p. 241.

79. Seydewitz, op. cit., p. 269.

80. Ibid.

81. Karl Dietrich Bracher, *The German Dictatorship* (New York, Praeger Publishers, 1970), p. 339.

82. Grunberger, op. cit., p. 254.